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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 5945
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2917
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9432
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2072
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 6491
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 4424
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1101
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000508

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: LTTE-KARUNA TENSIONS REMAIN HIGH IN
BATTICALOA

REF: A. COLOMBO 414

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 495

Classified By: DCM James F. Entwistle for reasons 1.4(b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Following the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Geneva in mid-February, the eastern district of Batticaloa has seen tension and turf battles between the LTTE and the breakaway Karuna faction. During a March 19-21 visit, poloff learned that civilians in Batticaloa face a daily strain while monitors find it difficult to work. Monitors reported increased recruitment and abduction over the past several weeks. The Elections Commissioner has postponed local elections in the district from March 30 to September 30. The climate appears precarious, both for eventual elections and for the second round of ceasefire negotiations, "Geneva Two," scheduled April 19-21. The LTTE appears to be fortifying its position in the East for the possibility that Geneva Two may fail. End summary.

CIVILIANS FEEL THE SQUEEZE BETWEEN LTTE AND KARUNA
FACTION

[1](#)2. (SBU) Poloff visited the eastern district of Batticaloa March 19-21 to observe the situation in the interim between the first round of talks February 22-23 in Geneva between the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the second round, scheduled to be held in Geneva April 19-21. According to all interlocutors, tensions between the LTTE and a

break-away group, referred to in the vernacular as the Karuna faction, have run high in the district. The Karuna faction opened two to three political offices in Batticaloa district in March under the auspices of its new political party, the Tamil Eelam Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal (TMVP). TMVP graffiti in simple red letters dominated signposts and marketplaces. On one main street, an elaborate LTTE mural with Tiger insignia had been almost completely covered in black paint. Recently, the LTTE called a hartal (strike), but the Karuna faction allegedly threatened shopkeepers to ignore the hartal order and re-open businesses (Ref A). Local Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) sub-head Leif Ohlson told poloff in a March 21 meeting that as a result, merchants stood in their doorways, opening and closing their shops at the approach of people they suspected to be cadres from either group.

13. (C) At a separate meeting March 21, UNHCR representative Lisa Sciclina told poloff, "On the ground, a working relationship exists between the government and the LTTE, but no national body is responsible for the protection of civilians in conflict affected areas." She said that as a result, tensions between the LTTE and the Karuna group take their greatest toll on civilians. In a discussion the previous day, D.D. David, General Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Society

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(YMCA), echoed this sentiment, saying civilians are afraid to disobey either the LTTE or the Karuna faction. He believes that while some

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appreciated Karuna's regional focus on the east, people were too frightened of the LTTE to overtly support the Karuna group. Rev. A. Jesuthasan, pastor of a local evangelical Christian church, told poloff, "People are afraid to talk, not knowing to which group people have their allegiance. When someone is killed, it's difficult to determine who is responsible." Jesuthasan and three other pastors said the public perception in the area was that the Karuna faction, and to some degree the anti-LTTE Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), enjoy military protection. Many interlocutors expressed that same view at separate meetings, but glanced cautiously around them, unsure whether passers-by supported the LTTE or the Karuna faction.

14. (C) SLMM representative Ohlson also cited a dramatic increase in reports of abductions in the past two weeks involving the LTTE and other armed groups - a total of thirteen adults and children abducted during the second week of March alone, while no abductions had been reported in January or February. He noted the Karuna group has become more visible, with no visible moves by the government to disarm the faction following the first round of talks.

SLMM MONITORS FACE DIFFICULTIES

15. (C) Ohlson, still visibly shocked by the January 13 bomb attack on SLMM vehicles in Batticaloa, also reported that Karuna cadres have attempted to enter the SLMM headquarters in Batticaloa on several occasions (Ref A). He added that intimidating Karuna cadres entered a house in which a monitor was making inquiries, causing the

SLMM to halt patrols in some areas. The SLMM has also received threatening phone calls they believe to be from the Karuna group, as well as threats that they must stop researching the alleged abductions of several LTTE-affiliated Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) members last January. Ohlson surmised that the LTTE would continue to catalog the GSL's failures to meet its Geneva promises to disarm unauthorized persons and groups in government-controlled territories.

¶6. (C) Ohlson also speculated the LTTE had approached monitors to report incidents the organization had likely perpetrated itself. In a March 20 meeting, Government Agent C. Punniyamoorthy refuted this claim to poloff, saying politicians and media unfairly blame the LTTE for incidents in Batticaloa when other armed groups are more likely at fault. He asserted the LTTE had given full support to development work and civil administration since it signed an MoU with the GSL in 2002.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION DELAYED IN BATTICALOA

¶7. (C) SLMM Chief Ohlson lauded the Election Commissioner's decision to postpone local elections in Batticaloa until September 30 (Ref ¶B. Ohlson posited that were the original March 3 date to stand, pre-election election violence may have been misinterpreted- or misrepresented- as ceasefire violations prior to a second round of

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GSL-LTTE talks in Geneva. Government Agent Punniyamoorthy speculated that come election time voters will likely favor the LTTE-backed Tamil National Alliance (TNA), although the United National Party (UNP), UPFA, anti-LTTE EPDP, Marxist Sinhalese nationalist Janatha Vimukthi Peremuna (JVP), Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), and SLMC-breakaway party National Congress will also run candidates.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) Epicenter for the past two years of factional violence between the LTTE and Karuna dissidents, Batticaloa has the dubious distinction of being the most volatile and potentially most dangerous district in the north and east. Since the GSL committed at the first round of talks to prohibit activities by "other armed groups," the scrutiny on Batticaloa has intensified, buttressed by fears that any violence (which had been a near-daily occurrence in the district before the talks) could jeopardize prospects for a second round of talks.

LUNSTEAD